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THE LOGIC OF EVALUATION

By Richard Shusterman

I

Evaluation of works of art has always been a major, if not the major, critical activity, and its logical analysis has consequently been for centuries an important subject of investigation and controversy in aesthetics. Many different accounts of the nature of aesthetic evaluation have been offered, and there is very little agreement. This may be expected when it is tacitly assumed, as it too often is, that evaluation is, logically, a more or less simple and uniform activity. However, I shall argue that critical evaluation comprises many different activities which do not reduce to one. Thus the demand for *the* logic of evaluation is spurious, since the variety of evaluative practices displays a variety of logical behaviour.

Morris Weitz has helped demonstrate this variety in his extensive study of Shakespeare's critics, who in evaluating "do many things: they praise, condemn, defend, extenuate, exhibit, judge, and revaluate". For Weitz, though there are similarities among these activities, they are not reducible to one essence, and thus:

> It is simply a false description of the logical behaviour of critical evaluation to say that *all* of them recommend, guide our choices, grade, persuade, judge, counsel, or emote.[1]

However, we shall later see that Weitz' pluralism does not go far enough and that his own account of evaluation ironically contains an implicit but very definite suggestion of a logical common denominator—non-descriptivism. Thus, though the path of logical pluralism has been pointed out, a proper trail has yet to be blazed.

Besides the variety of evaluative procedures, there is another source of complexity in the analysis of the logic of evaluation. For here, as with interpretative logic,[2] we find three distinguishable though closely connected aspects for analysis. The first concerns the logical status of evaluative statements. Do such statements express propositions or do they merely express decisions or recommendations? If the former, are these propositions really about the work of art itself or only about the critic's way of seeing it? And if about the work itself, are they in principle determinable as true or false, or only relatively true or false, or perhaps, at best, as merely justified or unjustified?

Evaluative judgements are typically supported by reasons. The second aspect of evaluative logic concerns the logical role of these reasons. Do they

[1] M. Weitz, *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (London, 1972), p. 270.

[2] See my study of interpretative logic, "The Logic of Interpretation", *Philosophical Quarterly*, 28 (1978).

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function as evidence or principles logically supporting an evaluative conclusion, or are they merely some means of persuading the reader to adopt the critic's judgement? Are they perhaps but further descriptions of the critic's view of the work, or are they devices for focusing attention on the work in such a manner that its value may be readily perceived?

Finally, the third aspect, closely related to the second, concerns the general logical form of evaluative argument. If such arguments are indeed logical, is their logic typically inductive, deductive, or rather something entirely different?

This plurality of aspects cannot by itself explain why analytic philosophers of art have proposed so many different views of the logic of evaluation. For even with respect to the same aspect, very different conclusions have been reached. Nor can this multiplicity of conflicting accounts be regarded as a matter of proposing different programmes for evaluation, for these philosophers generally claim to be analysing or describing the logic actually practised, not recommending or prescribing how critics should practise. Why then is there such a wide divergence of analyses of evaluative logic, and why, despite extended study and debate, do we seem no closer to identifying the correct analysis?

The reason, as I have already suggested, is that the issue itself is spurious. There is no one correct account of evaluative logic, for there is no one evaluative logic to be accounted for. If we abandon the assumption that there is or must be, but rather survey the actual logic of various evaluative activities, we shall find not one but rather many "logics" of evaluation. Evaluating critics play different evaluative "games" with different sets of rules or "logics" implicit in the games they practise. These different games serve and reflect different aims, yet the diversity of these games is concealed by the fact that they are not explicitly formulated or demarcated and tend somewhat to overlap. The diversity of evaluative logics is further concealed by their employing much the same terms (e.g., 'the novel', 'the right evaluation', 'great', 'justify', etc.) though often using them in very different senses. Philosophers provide different analyses of evaluative logic, because they are analysing different logics; they take as paradigms different evaluative games.

Though logical plurality exists in all three aspects of evaluative logic, in a paper of this scope I can treat no more than the first, the logical status of evaluative statements. As in my study of interpretative logic, I shall substantiate the claim of logical plurality by examining the major theories and indicating the different critical games which they respectively portray. To a given philosopher or critic, one evaluative game may seem more appealing or profitable, and thus he is often brought to ignore the others or even deny that they constitute "true" criticism. However, the nature of true criticism or of literary evaluation is, of course, neither given nor evident, but rather essentially contested by critics. Thus we should be wary of aestheticians who present the analysis of their paradigm as the whole or

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essential truth about evaluation, and then defend it as such simply by rejecting all evaluative games which do not suit it as sub-standard, aberrant, or just not *literary* evaluation at all. As practising critics we may refuse to employ the alternatives, as literary theorists we may stress their limitations, but as analytic philosophers we cannot afford to ignore them.

II

There seem to be three main accounts of the logical status of evaluative statements: descriptivism, prescriptivism, and performativism. For convenience in comparing these theories we may employ a general formula, '*W* is *E*', as representing a typical evaluative judgement (e.g., '*Moby Dick* is a great novel', '*Measure for Measure* is an artistic failure'), where '*W*' takes works of art as values, and '*E*' takes evaluative predicates. The three different theories may then be concisely characterized by their different analyses of this formula.

However, in using such a formula (and I am not the only one to do so[3]), I must emphasize its dangers. The generality of its form may be misleading in that it suggests a simplicity or uniformity that does not really exist. In the first place, there are troubles with '*W*', since many evaluative statements do not have as their subjects particular works of art but rather authors (i.e., an author's work as a whole) or certain parts or aspects of particular works. In other words, evaluative judgement is often not of an individual work, but rather of particular elements in the work or of a composite of more than one work. Indeed, some of our greatest critics, such as Johnson and Eliot, even express a preference for evaluating authors rather than particular works. Moreover, though there is an obvious connection between the evaluation of the author's work and evaluation of his particular works, it is far from one of simple correspondence. Our evaluation of an author can be very different depending on whether we reach it inductively from evaluation of his particular works or whether we instead evaluate him by viewing his work as a whole. Eliot's study of the differing evaluations of Poe makes this point with unquestionable force.[4]

Thus, there are problems in taking particular works of art to be the standard, let alone the only, subjects of evaluative statements. But our formula is also misleading in the uniformity suggested by the variable '*E*', which seems to represent a simple and patently evaluative predicate like 'good', 'bad', 'great', etc. For many, if not most, evaluative judgements are not the ascribing of such simple and pristine evaluative predicates. First, many are not categorical ascriptions at all but rather comparative judgements of the form '*X* is better than *Y*', or superlative judgements of the form '*X* is the best (or greatest) of the group of works *XYZ*'. Secondly,

[3]Stevenson, whose theory of evaluation will soon be discussed, employs a similar formula. See C. L. Stevenson, "Interpretation and Evaluation in Aesthetics", in M. Black (ed.), *Philosophical Analysis* (Ithaca, 1950), pp. 348-76.

[4]T. S. Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry", in *To Criticize The Critic* (London, 1965).

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many evaluative statements are not purely evaluative in the sense of conveying wholly or primarily "evaluative" (as opposed to "descriptive") meaning as distinguished by Hare and others.[5] There is, at least in criticism, a continuum between the descriptive and the evaluative which the variable '*E*' may belie. Many descriptive terms are also strongly evaluative: e.g., 'unified', 'rich', 'powerful', 'moving', 'insincere', 'superficial', 'mature', 'incoherent', 'penetrating', etc. In many of the critic's evaluative judgements, it is these rather than the purely evaluative predicates which serve as values of '*E*'.

Indeed, so much of the critic's language straddles in this manner the evaluative/descriptive distinction, that I think the many philosophers who wrestle with the problem of how the critic can move from a non-evaluative description to an evaluative judgement are concerned with a problem of their own making and not one of actual critical argument. When the critic's initial description or interpretation already contains evaluative import or force, there is no need to wonder how he can derive an evaluative judgement from it. Critics are probably more aware of this continuum or overlap than philosophers. Leavis, for example, admits that in his study of Shelley "we feel our description merging into criticism . . . passing, by inevitable transitions, from describing characteristics to making adverse judgements".[6]

III

Having pointed out the limitations of the formula, I can more comfortably use it for my limited purpose of characterizing the different theories about evaluative statements, the first of which may be called descriptivism. Descriptivism regards evaluative statements as expressing propositions with some sort of truth value. But different versions of descriptivism find very different propositions in the same typical evaluative statement. Subjectivism analyses '*W* is *E*' as '*W* is *E* to me'; e.g., it is beautiful to me. Several critics and philosophers have held this position. D. H. Lawrence, admired critic as well as novelist, asserts that "literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced in the critic by the book he is criticizing".[7] Pater also presents evaluation as subjective:

> What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or a book to me? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence and under its influence?[8]

Much evaluation clearly is of this sort, the relating of the valuable or unfavourable impressions or effects the work gives the reader and of his

[5] R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford, 1964), ch. 7.

[6] F. R. Leavis, "Thought and Emotional Quality", *Scrutiny*, 13 (1945-46), p. 60.

[7] D. H. Lawrence, "John Galsworthy", in *Phoenix* (New York, 1936), p. 539.

[8] W. Pater, *The Renaissance* (London, 1912), p. x. A more modern and philosophically argued defence of subjectivism is presented by C. J. Ducasse, "The Subjectivity of Aesthetic Value", in J. Hospers (ed.), *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics* (London, 1969).

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consequent attitude toward it. Indeed, we can even point to an entire stream or school of criticism characterized by the dominant use of such evaluative statements and consequently termed "impressionistic criticism". Moreover, even critics who claim to be giving objective judgements often speak in personal and affective terms which lend themselves to subjectivist interpretation: e.g., 'The novel so amused and fascinated me that I was sorry to have finished it', or 'The only impression the book left on me was of boredom and fatigue'. The evaluative import and subjective character of such typical statements are, I think, undeniable. Thus many evaluative statements are subjective descriptions, which, if the critic is sincere, are likely to be true. It might be argued that such truths are aesthetically unimportant, since they seem to be more about the critic than the work criticized. However, two defences of impressionistic evaluation may be made. First, with respect to its personal, subjective character, one can argue that even if the final goal is a shared objective judgement, a necessary step toward this goal is the formulating and voicing of one's personal impression or judgement. For unless expressed it can never be confirmed or corrected into a more than personal, objective evaluation. As Pater argued for his impressionistic practice:

> In aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly (*op. cit.*, p. x).

A second defence of the aesthetic significance of impressionistic criticism is its frequent power. Passionate personal confession is often more potent and compelling than reasoned impersonal judgement. Thus, an eloquent impressionistic encomium of a literary work would be far more likely to encourage a potential reader to examine the work (or an unimpressed reader to peruse it more carefully) than would a dry and principled evaluation, no matter how well-supported. Perhaps this is because such encomia, when well-written, more completely present or convey a sense of the value the critic is impressed with. Whatever the reason, the perlocutionary force of impressionistic criticism is undeniable, and even its opponents, e.g., Eliot, testify to its power.[9]

There are, then, many overtly subjective or impressionistic evaluations which are likely to be true and aesthetically significant and powerful. Moreover, many allegedly objective evaluations may readily be seen as disguised subjective judgements. Thus, much evaluative practice lends itself to the view that critical evaluation is essentially subjective. Subjectivism seems to have the added virtue of neatly accounting for the great variety of apparently intelligent yet conflicting evaluations of a given work of art, and for their being adamantly resistant to argument. For the fact that one critic is impressed one way does not logically hinder a different critic from

[9]T. S. Eliot, "The Perfect Critic", in F. Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1975), p. 52.

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being differently impressed. *De gustibus non est disputandum*, the subjectivist concludes, and hopes by his view to promote peace and tolerance among evaluating critics.

This is clearly not the programme of the absolutist or strong descriptivist for whom '*W* is *E*' means simply '*W* is *E*'. The absolutist holds that evaluative judgements are either true or false, and that conflicting evaluations are incompatible and cannot be accepted. We may never know or be certain of the true evaluation, but it is there to be known and renders those incompatible with it false. Though subjectivism's tolerance seems advantageous, one might regard it as a disadvantage in that it seems to make evaluative debate quite pointless, if indeed possible. The subjectivist might explain any such debate as largely exhortatory, springing from the critic's desire that other readers should share his attitudes and impressions, enjoy what he enjoys. Still, the absolutist gives a far nobler justification of evaluative polemics—the search for impersonal, objective truth.

Several philosophers have held theories which may be characterized as absolutist, where the value of '*E*' is conceived as designating an objective property of the work of art, such as beauty, expression, or aesthetic value (either intrinsic or instrumental).[10] Certainly many critics have seen their job as determining the truth, the true value or merit of a work. Johnson in the seventeenth century speaks of "the task of criticism . . . to improve opinion into knowledge".[11] Eliot and Leavis speak of "the common pursuit of true judgement".[12] The American critic, Yvor Winters, is perhaps the most outspoken proponent of evaluative absolutism.

> The absolutist believes in the existence of absolute truths and values. . . . The relativist, on the other hand, believes that there are no absolute truths, that the judgement of every man is right for himself. . . . The theory of literature which I defend . . . is absolutist.[13]

However, not only do the declarations and terminology of many critics demonstrate a theoretical commitment to the absolutist position, but their extensive attempts to prove the truth of their judgements by reasoned argument strongly suggest that their practice is based on absolutist presuppositions. Even Weitz, whose aim is to deny the validity of these assumptions, readily admits this.[14]

Is it credible to assume that evaluative statements may express true propositions, objective facts, about works of art? Are there evaluative facts? Of course, if we decide on philosophical grounds to distinguish sharply facts

[10]See, for example, T. E. Jessop, "The Objectivity of Aesthetic Value", in Hospers, *op. cit.*; H. Osborne, *The Theory of Beauty* (London, 1952), pp. 200-203, and *Aesthetics and Criticism* (London, 1955), pp. 43-44, 218-19; and M. C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics* (New York, 1958), ch. 11.

[11]S. Johnson, *Rambler* No. 92, *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven, 1969), vol. 4, p. 122.

[12]F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. v.

[13]Y. Winters, *In Defence of Reason* (Denver, 1947), pp. 10-11.

[14]Weitz, *op. cit.* (fn. 1 above), pp. 212-13, 269-70.

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from values, the answer is no, and absolutism collapses. But if we are more sceptical of what Austin called "the value/fact fetish" and actually look at some of our evaluative statements, I think we may find some evaluative facts which give an element of truth to the absolutist position. The *Iliad* is a great epic. Sophocles was a great tragedian. The *Divine Comedy* is a masterpiece. Shakespeare is better than Beaumont and Fletcher. Would we not affirm these propositions as unmistakably true? Are these statements not as true or factual as the non-evaluative 'Saturn has rings' or 'Caesar conquered Gaul'?

Of course, it is always possible to question the truth of such evaluative statements, but this means only that they are not necessarily true but rather matters of fact. Like other *a posteriori* statements, their truth cannot be logically demonstrated or established necessarily or absolutely, but only more or less confirmed by experience. And this is very close to what Johnson asserts in comparing the truth of the Pythagorean theorem to that of Shakespeare's greatness.

> To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientific, but speaking wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem.[15]

The sort of evaluative facts I have mentioned constitute a kind of common sense in criticism, and it is worth noting that attempts to refute them, e.g., Tolstoy's attempted proof of Shakespeare's mediocrity, greatly resemble the metaphysical refutations of our common-sense beliefs concerning the reality of time and material objects. We follow the arguments, but even if we have difficulty in refuting them, we are certain their conclusions are wrong. Thus criticism seems to engage with some evaluative facts which give support to a strong descriptivist view of evaluative statements. The absolutist would then argue that if some facts have been established, it lacks but time and critical acumen for all evaluative statements to be determined as true or false. Absolutism is thus not a baseless theory, but its actual basis of evaluative facts hardly gives it a convincing claim to describe the logical status of *all* evaluative statements.

The relativists or weak descriptivists certainly find it unconvincing. They are more impressed by the fact that competent critics have offered a wide variety of conflicting judgements and perhaps an even wider variety of standards and principles upon which these judgements are based. The evidence they bring of this variety is quite substantial. The relativist is ready to admit that some evaluative judgements are better than others, even that some are clearly wrong. However, he argues, there still remain several conflicting evaluations which are all in some sense adequate and well-reasoned, and he rejects the absolutist's move of assuming that only

[15] W. Raleigh (ed.), *Johnson on Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1925), p. 9.

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one can be true and that hence others must be regarded as false. The relativist's intermediate position between absolutism and subjectivism is to regard '*W* is *E*' as '*W* is *E* by (the adequate) standard *S*' or, more simply, ' '*W* is *E*' is adequate'. Objectivity is saved by being rendered conditional upon standards, and diversity of judgement is saved by the fact that though some standards are clearly wrong or irrelevant, many different standards (yielding differing judgements) are acceptable, relevant, or adequate for evaluating art.

Such a position has been popular with aestheticians and critics alike. B. Heyl, who has given critical relativism perhaps its most extensive formulation, distinguishes between competent and incompetent judgements, and advocates

> a relativism . . . which recognizes the necessity for and justifies the existence of sound judgements of better and worse. These, however, cannot be considered absolute or final, for they depend both upon philosophic assumptions and upon empirical criteria which will vary somewhat from individual to individual, culture to culture.[16]

Similarly, the critic and theorist E. D. Hirsch, after arguing against any one type of privileged evaluative criteria, still goes on to argue that "if there is no privilege in literary evaluation there is nevertheless objectivity and accuracy, and these reside entirely in the judged relationship between literature and the criteria we choose to apply to it".[17] Helen Gardner likewise adopts a position of evaluative relativism, "not disturbed by the thought that many critics . . . give a very different account of their beliefs and practices. . . . Good taste is not absolute. Two persons of excellent taste and judgement may differ strongly on the relative merits of two works".[18]

Certain critics, then, endorse relativism; but do critics ever make explicitly relativistic or conditional evaluations? We might return to an example provided by a critic whose affinities are not clearly relativistic. Eliot, after all, shows that our evaluation of Poe is relative to whether we judge his work "analytically", poem by poem, or "take a distant view of it as a whole".[19] In the end, Eliot chooses the latter standard and a consequently higher evaluation of Poe, but the relative or conditional nature of such a judgement is obvious. Differing conclusions here can both be accurate and objective, relative as they are to different criteria. The relativist can bring an impressive list of such conditional evaluations (which are reversed when other criteria are employed or more strongly emphasized) as evidence that his position truly reflects the general nature of evaluative statements.[20]

[16]B. Heyl, *New Bearings in Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (New Haven, 1943), pp. 154-5. For a more recent defence of relativism see J. Margolis, "Robust Relativism", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 35 (1976).

[17]E. D. Hirsch, "Privileged Criteria in Literary Evaluation", in J. Strelka (ed.), *Problems of Literary Evaluation* (London, 1969), p. 33.

[18]H. Gardner, *The Business of Criticism* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 6-7.

[19]Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry" (fn. 4 above), p. 27.

[20]See Heyl, *op. cit.*, and also the work of other relativists he cites; e.g., E. E. Kellett, *Fashion in Literature* (London, 1931).

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But the absolutist, aware of this arsenal of evidence, will reply in kind as Winters has:

> that the best critics . . . approximate accuracy fairly closely: by that I mean great men tend to agree with each other . . . I am more or less aware of the extent of the catalogue of disagreements that might be drawn up in reply to such a statement, but it is far less astounding than, let us say, the unanimity of the best minds on the subject of Homer and Vergil, particularly if we accept the doctrine of relativism with any great seriousness.[21]

Which indeed is more astounding? Do evaluative facts or conditional judgements more truly depict the logical character of evaluative statements? I believe this loaded question must be discharged by affirming that both are truly representative of evaluative statements, as indeed are impressionistic judgements. Evaluative statements do not reduce to a quintessential logical character. Thus far we have seen the logical plurality only within the descriptivist framework; but there are two other general theories which claim to be the model or correct analysis of all standard evaluative judgements, yet which depict, like descriptivism, only some of the many evaluative games that critics play.

IV

Prescriptivism holds that evaluative statements do not express true or false propositions, not even relatively adequate or conditionally accurate ones; they are instead taken as expressing decisions or recommendations as to how the work of art should be regarded. The prescriptivist analyses '*W* is *E*' as '*W* should be seen or taken as *E*', or, more simply, 'Prize [despise] *W*'.[22] A work of art may be considered from many points of view, seen in different ways, and thus can be differently evaluated. According to prescriptivism, the evaluating critic is expressing his own manner of regarding the work and recommending that we should adopt the same manner. His arguments to support his evaluation may then be construed as attempts to get us to accept his recommendation and thus take or evaluate the work as he does. This position is suggested in Wittgenstein's lectures on aesthetics and in his notion of 'seeing as'.[23] But we can still find an earlier and stronger suggestion in A. J. Ayer's emotive theory of evaluative judgements:

> They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood. . . . It follows, as in ethics, that there is no sense in attributing objective validity to aesthetic

[21]Winters, *op. cit.* (in fn. 13 above), p. 76.

[22]The first formulation suits quasi-descriptive evaluative predicates, e.g., 'graceful', 'well-constructed', etc., while the latter is for more purely evaluative predicates, e.g., 'good', 'bad', etc. The first formulation, if taken as the analysis of all critical evaluations, runs the risk of infinite regress, unless there is a non-critical meaning of '*E*' to which we can appeal to halt the regress.

[23]See his treatment of evaluative judgements as expressions of approval rather than as ascriptions of properties to objects, in *Lectures and Conversations* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 1-2.

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> judgements. . . . The critic, by calling attention to certain features of the work under review, endeavours to make us share his attitude towards the work as a whole.[24]

Stevenson, who gives the clearest and most cogent presentation of prescriptivism, argues that evaluative judgements are essentially expressions of "the critic's decision" on how the work of art should be observed and "quasi-imperative" recommendations that others should regard it similarly. "Having roughly familiarized himself with the ways in which a work of art *can* be experienced, a critic must proceed to make a selection from among them —a *decision* about how he is to observe the work in the course of his subsequent appreciation."[25] The critic's task is not to decide for himself alone but by recommending his decision "to help others make up their minds". For Stevenson, the critic's decision introduces the prescriptive or normative character of evaluative judgements, because such decisions are motivated and governed by factors that are not purely logical or cognitive. He thus argues that behind their frequent guise of objectivity, evaluative statements really function as prescriptions or quasi-imperative recommendations. Thus, for example, when the critic asserts that a work is unified, he is implicitly, but essentially, urging that we observe it in that way; and our assent to this assertion may be compared "with the overtly imperative expression, 'Yes, let's observe it in the way that makes it appear unified' ". Now, though Stevenson treats 'unified' as basically an interpretative term, the example is still valid for evaluation, since he assures us:

> The same considerations arise, of course, not only for judgements about unity but for all judgements of the form 'The work of art is Q_c', and thus for all interpretative and evaluative judgements.[26]

Prescriptivism, as Stevenson formulates it, has some affinities with relativism. One could regard the relativist's appeal to a standard as involved in the prescriptivist's decision. Like relativism, it can account for the toleration of varying evaluative judgements and their typical challengeability. There are many ways of regarding a work of art, and one evaluation, i.e., the adoption and recommendation of one way, does not logically exclude other ways as false or fruitless. Yet prescriptivism must be distinguished from relativism in that it construes all evaluative judgements as non-cognitive and normative. They essentially express decisions and recommendations, and thus not even relative or conditional truths. Critical debate is explained and justified as controversy over which evaluative decision should be made, and though one can argue whether a decision is better or worse, or right or wrong, neither it nor the statement expressing it can be true or false.

Prescriptivism purports to analyse actual evaluative practice, but before considering evaluations which suit and support prescriptivism, I should like

[24] *Language, Truth, and Logic* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 144, 150.

[25] Stevenson, *op. cit.* (in fn. 3 above), p. 357.

[26] See *op. cit.* pp. 376-80.

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to expose one very questionable element in Stevenson's formulation of it. I am not referring to his apparent reduction of all evaluative (and interpretative) judgements to the form 'The work of art is Q_c'. My introductory remarks about the formula 'W is E' should provide sufficient criticism of this. The problem here is rather Stevenson's conception of the evaluative process and the critic's decision. The critic is portrayed as "attempting to become familiar with the *possibilities*" of the work, "the various ways in which it *can* be experienced", and then proceeding "to make a selection from them—a *decision* about how he is to observe the work in the course of his subsequent appreciation".[27]

This hardly seems a happy or accurate account of how a critic goes about his business; the extensive evaluative process Stevenson describes hardly seems generally practised or even feasible. Such a complicated process of sampling the various ways in which a work *can* be experienced before making an evaluative decision might, if conscientiously undertaken, never be completed, given the innumerable possible ways of experiencing a work. Do critics really perform such demanding experiments? Their frequent expressions of astonishment at opposing views are evidence of incomplete sampling, but are not coupled with apologies for taking short cuts in the critical process. Surely the impressionistic critic does not patiently sample and then judiciously select? Nor do other critics indicate that they engage in such a process, but some instead suggest that the critic is struck by or surrenders to an immediate view of the work, which he then seeks to articulate, elucidate, and confirm.[28] Stevenson's strangely complicated account of the evaluative process, if at all acceptable, is surely not true of all critical evaluation.

This criticism, however, does not damage the general prescriptivist position. That a work or author may be differently evaluated if taken in different ways, or in the light of different standards, is clear from our account of relativism. Is there also evidence for the prescriptivist tenet that the critic is essentially deciding and urging that, of the possible ways of seeing the work, his should be adopted, and that the evaluative statement is in this sense normative and quasi-imperative? Some remarks of Leavis seem to provide such evidence. His confession that his evaluations "aim at little more than to suggest coercively the reorientation from which revaluation follows"[29] certainly fits the prescriptivist model, as does his appeal for a higher evaluation of Wordsworth, "A poet who can bring home to us the possibility of such a naturalness should today be found important".[30] Leavis employs another type of prescriptive sounding evaluative statement to praise George Eliot's characterization of Gwendolen Harleth: "And see how

[27] *Op. cit.*, pp. 356-7.

[28] Eliot, for example; see Kermode, *op. cit.* (in fn. 9 above), pp. 13-16.

[29] *Revaluation* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 68-9.

[30] *Op. cit.*, p. 160.

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the girl is known, inside out, how thoroughly she is felt and understood. It is the most intelligent thing in all George Eliot's writing; and that is saying much".[31] Such quasi-imperative recommendations to see or appreciate value in a literary work are surely not atypical, and thus it seems that prescriptivism is a just account of at least some evaluative statements. Prescriptivism, however, asserts not only that there are such overtly prescriptive evaluations, but that all critical evaluation is essentially prescriptive, where allegedly descriptive statements are merely disguised prescriptions. Some no doubt are, but many, we have seen, are not; and prescriptivism is thus unsatisfactory.

V

Performativism presents yet another view of evaluative statements. Evaluations are neither descriptions nor mere prescriptions but rather performances or "performatives". The performativist construes the utterance of '*W* is *E*' as rendering or presenting *W* as *E*. This theory derives from Austin's work on performative utterances and speech acts, and particularly from his attempt to draw a sharp distinction between the performative and the constative or descriptive. By virtue of this dichotomy (which Austin perhaps never really believed in and ultimately rejected), the act of evaluating—praising, condemning, etc.—cannot be identified with describing, and thus evaluative predicates cannot function as descriptive predicates. There are many kinds of evaluative performatives or speech acts, but description cannot be one of them. The performativist likens critical evaluation to other kinds of performance, particularly to that of the judge rendering a verdict, the performing artist displaying and in some sense creating aesthetic value, and the counsel creating a client's case. This is in contrast to the scientist or logician who merely describes, and, say, the pushy salesman who merely urges.

Performativism, like prescriptivism, can account for and justify evaluative debate. The variety of differing evaluations can be explained in terms of the variety of ways in which the work of art may be presented or performed, or the variety of judicial judgement, where the differing verdicts may oppose but can neither refute nor falsify one another, though they can cast extra light by their opposition. Moreover, as the critic, on the prescriptivist theory, in assessing evaluations may employ the normative labels 'right' and 'wrong' correlative to the descriptivist 'true' and 'false', so, according to the performativist, he may characterize or grade evaluations as adequate or inadequate, convincing or unconvincing, justified or unjustified.

Margaret Macdonald provides the most explicitly performativist view. The evaluative statement 'This is good', she argues, is not like the description 'This is red', but rather like the verdict 'He is guilty'. The critic's

[31] *The Great Tradition* (London, 1962), p. 91.

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judgement, like a judicial verdict, does not describe but

> affirms a decision reached by a definite procedure but unlike that of relating evidence to conclusion in deductive and inductive inference. . . . By calling a work 'good' he places the hall-mark on an artistic performance. But he does not describe it or himself. So that to affirm a work good is more like bestowing a medal than naming any feature of it or of its creators or audience. Verdicts and awards are not true or false. They may be reversed but not disproved. But they can be justified and unjustified.[32]

Macdonald also likens the critic's task to that of the performing artist in that he presents or actualizes and thus contributes to the work's value, and to that of a lawyer who from given facts creates his client's case. "But he differs from these . . . in being also a judge of what he presents. . . . To judge a work of art, therefore, is to give a verdict on something to which the judge has contributed and this also "justifies" the verdict." She is careful to point out, however, that not all judgements are of equal value: there are "better" and "worse" judgements which "are generally appraised in relation to qualities of the critic". Macdonald thus concludes that to evaluate "is to commend or condemn, but not describe", by " "presenting" and not "proving" the merits of works of art"; it is "more like creation than like demonstration and proof".[33]

Morris Weitz, who also presents a performativist theory, does not go so far as to liken critical evaluation to the "exercitive" performative of bestowing a medal, or to the performing artist's contribution of value to the work evaluated. However, he does liken the critic to a counsel (with Pope and Coleridge) and a judge (with Johnson) and stresses the logical multiplicity of performance involved in these jobs.[34] The critic, as counsel, may try to refute or also extenuate charges, and as judge he may weigh the evidence presented for others to judge or may himself deliver the verdict.

Earlier I remarked that Weitz recognizes the irreducible multiplicity of evaluative activities; but here I must emphasize that he strictly excludes description from these activities, so that evaluative predicates "do not function as descriptive predicates":

> 'Great' is not a term that critics use to describe or to explain, but primarily to praise; '*Hamlet* is a great drama' is not a sentence that critics employ to state a fact, it, too, functions primarily to praise.[35]

Perhaps it is rigid adherence to the fact/value dichotomy or to the performative/constative distinction which prevents Weitz from recognizing that some evaluations are descriptively or factually true and that some descriptions are highly evaluative. Whatever the cause, he rejects the possibility

[32]"Some Distinctive Features of Arguments Used in Criticism of the Arts", in W. Elton (ed.), *Aesthetics and Language* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 121-2.

[33]*Op. cit.*, pp. 127-30.

[34]Weitz, *op. cit.* (in fn. 1 above), pp. 154-6, 168, 270-84.

[35]*Op. cit.*, pp. 275, 279.

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"that critical evaluations are true (or false) descriptive reports on the merits or demerits of works of art or on our responses to them", a thesis which he thinks "misrepresents the role of evaluation in criticism".[36]

Though incapable of being true or false, evaluations may be, for Weitz, "more or less adequate"; and he gives "five different tests or criteria for the adequacy of evaluative criticism", maintaining, however, that "we cannot . . . rank these criteria of adequacy so that particular critics can be graded". Thus he concludes that we are free to choose our favourite from among many adequate evaluations of a work, apparently just as we might choose a favourite performance of it. "Once the question of the truth (or falsity) of evaluations is repudiated, as it must be, the reader can choose his favourite evaluative critic, giving as the reasons for his choice any of these criteria of adequacy". This explains why while "few today accept Johnson's or Coleridge's . . . evaluations as defensible", they are still highly regarded "because they speak clearly, empirically, and for the most part richly" about the works they evaluate.[37]

The performativist view of evaluation has been presented. Is there evidence for it in the statements or practice of critics, evidence that they set out to praise or condemn rather than describe? There is little doubt of this. Criticism abounds in exclamations of praise like that of Coleridge praising Shakespeare's art: "How admirable, too, is the judgement of the poet!".[38] Though the descriptivist will try to see this as a disguised act of describing, and the prescriptivist as an exhortation to see something admirable, it is clear that such exclamations in their typical contexts function primarily as acts of praise rather than descriptions or prescriptions.

There is also evidence for the view that critics assess evaluations in terms of power and creativity rather than truth. T. S. Eliot and Helen Gardner praise Coleridge as perhaps the greatest English critic, despite his alleged "critical aberrations", because his evaluations "permanently affect our own reading" of the works he criticized, for what he has to say "enlarges our conception of their value or gives them fresh relevance".[39] Oscar Wilde has also advocated this view in *The Critic as Artist*; and even Johnson, hardly a performativist critic, praises Dryden's criticism for being "a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction and where the critic proves his right of judgement by his power of performance".[40] Moreover, it does seem that the eloquent and imaginative ways in which critics have tried to reveal or enhance a work's value often contribute to

[36] *Op. cit.*, p. 280.

[37] *Op. cit.*, p. 283.

[38] T. M. Raysor (ed.), *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism* (London, 1960), vol. ii, p. 150.

[39] Gardner, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11; T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet", in Kermode, *op. cit.*, p. 45, and "The Perfect Critic", p. 50.

[40] S. Johnson, "John Dryden", *The Lives of the English Poets* (London, 1958), vol. 1, p. 226.

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the value accruing to the work in time. There is an institutional aspect of critical evaluation which performativism seems aware of.

However, even if such evidence is discounted, there is one type of evaluative statement which can surely claim to be performative rather than descriptive or prescriptive. When the critic, as reviewer, tells the reader "This book is highly recommended", in the sense of "I highly recommend this book", he is not describing it as such nor urging that we should regard it as such. He is rendering it such, in his official capacity. He is evaluating here, but he is doing so by exercising his power as an authorized agent of the art world. In such cases, performativism clearly seems to be right, and perhaps Macdonald was thinking of such cases when she advanced her theory. But have we not seen other kinds of evaluative statements which seem to justify not performativism but its rival theories? Surely it seems wise to adopt a position of pluralism, and recognize the logical variety of evaluative statements that begets the variety of unsatisfactory monistic theories of evaluation.

VI

In advocating my position of logical pluralism, I have paradoxically argued that the rival theories of evaluative logic are wrong because they are all partly right. In reaching somewhat similar conclusions to a different problem, T. S. Eliot shrewdly observes that "the more usual reason for the unsatisfactoriness of our theories and general statements about poetry is that while professing to apply to all poetry, they are really theories about . . . a limited range of poetry"; "we are generalizing from the poetry which we best know and best like; not from all poetry, or even all of the poetry which we have read".[41]

These remarks on poetic theory are strikingly pertinent to monistic metacritical theories of evaluation, as I trust my discussion of descriptivism, prescriptivism, and performativism has shown. Each, I have argued, contains more than a grain of truth, but they all err by over-generalization. An adequate account of some evaluative statements will be an inadequate account of *all* evaluative statements, because evaluative statements often differ greatly in their logical nature.

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[41] *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London, 1964), pp. 139, 141.

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